

# micro shelters



**59**  
**CREATIVE  
CABINS,  
TINY HOUSES,  
TREE HOUSES,  
AND OTHER  
SMALL  
STRUCTURES**



**DEREK “DEEK” DIEDRICKSEN, CREATOR OF RELAXSHACKS.COM**

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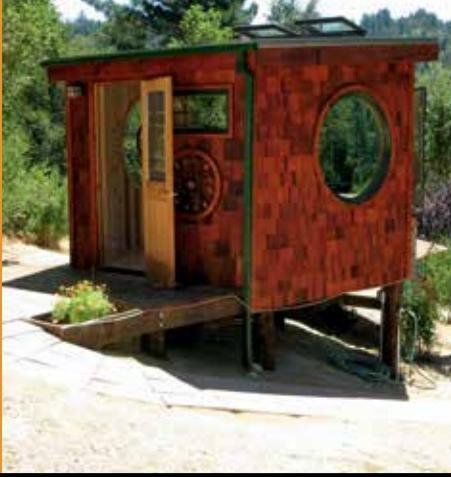
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potentially dangerous activities. Follow all applicable state and local building codes.**

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## WHAT'S WITH THE “TINY” OBSESSION?

I'VE BEEN ASKED this question many times, and there's no easy answer. I just dig tiny, cozy structures. As to why, there are numerous reasons, some you might not anticipate.

Creating a microstructure involves creative thinking, outdoor activity, and problem-solving — things many people crave but often find absent from their busy (and sometimes repetitious and regimented) modern lives. And not only is it a relatively affordable pursuit, it also requires far less time and patience than building something of “ginormous” proportions. That's the beauty of very tiny projects: they're easy on both the wallet and the mind.

Their small size also makes them easy on the neighbors.

Depending on where you live you can also build many structures, including many in this book, without a permit. Heck, if you do need a permit and later get busted for building without one (not that I'm encouraging that . . .), how hard is it to relocate a diminutive backyard hut or office? Toss that sucker on the back of a truck, or haul it off-site with a flatbed, and you're good to go.

Building small requires relatively few resources, and you'll find many structures here that have been designed around, and built with, free, salvaged, and recycled materials. By taking this path you're keeping materials out of the waste stream and preventing them from clogging up landfills. You're also saving yourself a good deal of money while working unique and character-rich design elements into your home, office, or hideout. Sure, permit-wise, recycled goods may not be allowed in the construction of full-out homes, but with tinier builds and backyard hideouts that don't require town-hall paperwork, often there can be a lot more leeway. In some more rural areas you could even build a home out of recycled fast-food wrappers and bubble gum and no one would give you any guff . . . well, except the ants, perhaps.



# THE GIANT JOURNEY HOME

**Tumbleweed  
Tiny House  
Company, with  
alterations  
by Guillaume  
Dutilh and Jenna  
Spesard**  
**135 square feet,  
plus loft**  
**California**

**I**N TERMS OF STYLE, interior flow, and decor, the tiny house on wheels that is home to Guillaume Dutilh and Jenna Spesard would easily rank as one of the best I've seen. Perched on a 20-foot trailer, their dwelling-on-the-go (they've towed it around the entire US and much of Canada, blogging about their journey) is only 135 square feet, but with several

space-saving and visually appealing tactics, they make it feel like you're walking into more.

This home's shiplap siding was reclaimed from a 75-year-old barn in Wisconsin, complete with buckshot scars, and the unique circular storage loft window was trimmed from a solid stump of alligator juniper.





Steps and storage in one



## THE MINER'S SHELTER

Dave Frazee

45 square feet  
(plus 100 square  
feet exterior)

Taliesin West  
in Scottsdale,  
Arizona

**T**HE MINER'S SHELTER is a desert dwelling built and designed by Dave Frazee, a student at Taliesin, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. Both the concept and title were inspired by the architectural ruins that were found at the project's site. Held 2 feet above the desert surface by two steel posts and cuddled by a paloverde tree in one corner, this structure conveys a sense of longtime residence and belonging in the landscape.

Desert heat is a formidable opponent for any shelter, so Frazee and his team wisely covered the shelter

with steel panels attached to metal channels. These channels hold the panels 3 inches away from the wall and provide a shade space where hot air can vent away from the structure, keeping the interior cooler.

For materials, steel and wood (ebony-stained redwood) were selected for their aging qualities and durability in the desert. The rusted steel pays homage to the desert's rich mining history. Over time the panels will acquire a patina similar to that of the desert mountain range surrounding it.



### favorite features



Frazee explained his reasoning for the door's location: "The entrance to the shelter is intentionally located on the inner courtyard of the concrete pad, close to the chimney mass. This allows an occupant to open up the shelter and gain warmth on a cool night"—either from the nearby fire or from the day's solar heat stored in the slow-release thermal mass. Beyond its heating, cooling, and geographic orientation, I just love the openness of the Miner's Shelter and its surrounding views of the Phoenix Valley on one side and the McDowell Mountain Range on the other. Tiny house, big view.





## THE SUNSET HOUSE

**A**FTER QUITTING THEIR JOBS to begin building a cabin in the woods on generations-old family land, Nick Olson and Lilah Horwitz ended up with a getaway that stands as the grand example of being “naturally lighted.” Instead of trying to place their windows to chase or frame the sunset, the duo decided to go for an all-windowed approach on the cabin’s front wall, beginning with a sash they harvested from an old farm in Pennsylvania. From there, it became a quest of locating, and then framing and fitting, various windows — each with its own origin of interest and its own story to tell. Some windows open, others don’t, and the whole assembly comes off as rustic yet somehow cohesive and well planned at the same time. It’s shelter as art — not surprising, as Lilah, a clothing designer, and Nick, a photographer, are both very talented in their respective fields.

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Nick Olson and  
Lilah Horwitz

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216 square feet

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West Virginia



The Sunset House, a 12 x 18-foot shed-roofed cabin, completed in 2012, became the subject of a short film by the Half Cut Tea production company and soon went semi-viral, with almost one million views in under a year. Again, no surprise, as it's such a strikingly appealing space.



#### favorite features



**With the cabin's vast wall of glass, the sun might wake you sooner than you had planned in the Sunset House, but who could complain when greeted with that expansive vista? I suppose you might think, "But what about privacy?" But if you're deep in the middle of nowhere, the beauty is that you probably wouldn't need, or want, curtains. The raccoons might see what you've been up to, but who are they gonna tell?**

**Being a fan of natural wood, I'm also very glad that this place wasn't hastily slapped with an interior paint job. Paint has its time and place, but with great paint also comes great responsibility — the upkeep, the touch-ups, the time and money to coat a place to begin with, and so on. The cliché "less is more" certainly holds true in this case.**

# FERN FOREST TREE HOUSE

Harrison  
Reynolds  
(and son)

120 square feet

Lincoln, Vermont

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## EEP IN THE WOODS

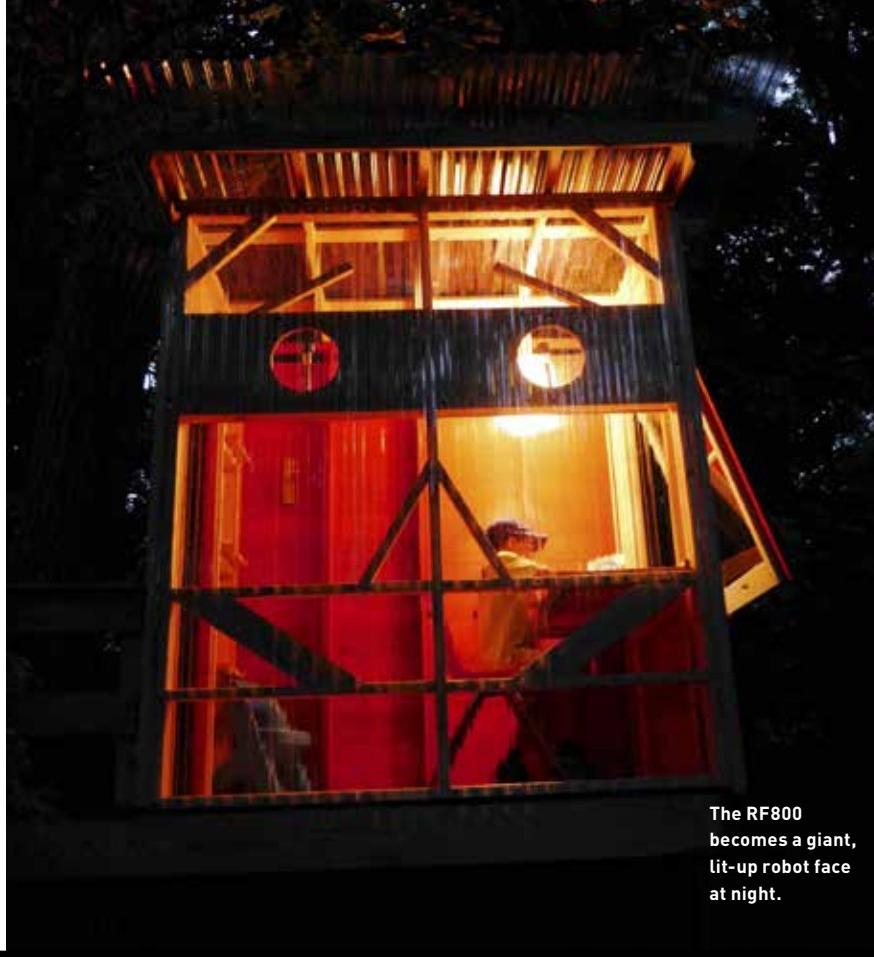
outside Bristol, Vermont, lies a quaint little tree house that was designed and built by retired woodworking teacher Harrison Reynolds and his son. This lofted lodge (another one you

can stay in via [airbnb.com](#)) is a dream-made-reality of Reynolds's, alongside author and host extraordinaire Ellie Bryant. In a short span of time the two have made this micro-inn rather famous. It is fame well deserved, too.



Tree growing  
through  
center of  
house





The RF800 becomes a giant, lit-up robot face at night.

Solar lamps become the eyes of the robot.



## THE RF 800

**J**UST BUILD PRETTY MUCH whatever you want, as long as you make it funky." Those are words I love to hear from a client, and more or less what I was told regarding this build near downtown Boston. My guidelines were that it had to be up in a tree (two oaks in this case), have a clear roof, and be big enough for two or three kids and their sleeping bags. I convinced the owner to let me make it versatile enough so that one day the adults could use this structure as a lofted office, and that was that: the RF 800 (short for Robot Face \$800) was born. By the time I completed this project, in the summer of 2014, I had begun wishing it were *my* office. It was great to see the kids fall in love with this place, and their mother, initially unsure about a giant robot head in her backyard, also came around when the tree house was finished and all lit up at night.

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**Deek Diedricksen**

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**28 square feet**

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**Boston area,  
Massachusetts**



## favorite features

The Robot Face tree house sits uphill from the owners' main home and is perfectly framed in their kitchen sink window. This way, while mom or dad cooks or washes dishes, they're able to see what the kids are up to. The tree house's clear front wall even allows a view within (and could be curtained for sleepovers). The see-through roof offers a view of the oak boughs above, and the removable desk, placed right in front of a swinging window, has its own great view. This whimsical shelter has solar light-up eyes, and it's functional too. The open framing creates an abundance of shelving for knickknacks, toys, or, later, office supplies.



Instead of trimming an extra-long board, I left it as it was and attached a swing.

# SHEPHERD'S HUTS

**Plankbridge**

**Hutmakers**

**28 square feet  
(and up)**

**Dorchester in  
Dorset, UK**

**P**

**LANKBRIDGE HUTMAKERS BEGAN** in Richard Lee's furniture-making workshop.

He was searching for an "outdoor room" design that could be replicated yet have a custom-made feel about it. Inspiration came from an old shepherd's hut that stood for many years on a hill close to where the writer Thomas Hardy lived, and soon Richard Lee and Jane Dennison had built a replica on a set of old wheels. The traditional shepherd's hut, originally used by a solitary shepherd while tending his sheep, seemed to have potential for a wide range of modern-day uses. The duo's fairly rustic reproductions later evolved into Plankbridge's highly insulated timber-frame huts. Despite the modern twist, Plankbridge is still keen to keep true to the heritage of the originals, as you can see.





**favorite  
features**

The vaulted roof of the Plankbridge shepherd's huts, like that of many gypsy wagons and vardos of old, lends itself well to small structures, softening the effects of edges: you gain height and also eliminate the in-your-face lines that tell you, "Here is where the peak is, and this is where the walls top out." It's a subtle way to create a feeling of spaciousness. In addition, I really like the old-world-meets-new approach in their design, not to mention the timber framing, clean lines, and woodworking. It is simplicity in fine form.